

Aster oregonensis (Nutt.) Cronq.
Oregon aster, Oregon white-topped aster
Asteraceae (Aster Family)

Status: State Review Group 1

Rank: G5T?S?

General Description: Adapted from Hitchcock et al. (1955): A perennial plant from a short, thickened crown which may occasionally elongate into a stout creeping rhizome, 16 to 48 in. (40 to 120 cm) tall, commonly branched above and bearing several to many small clusters of heads. The leaves contain small stiff hairs above, sometimes beneath, and are glandular beneath. The lowermost leaves are more or less reduced and soon deciduous with the largest ones a little above the base of the stem. They are oblanceolate with a reduced petiole, $1\frac{1}{2}$ to 3 in. (4 to 8 cm) long, about $\frac{1}{2}$ in. (1 cm) wide, and often deciduous. The middle and upper leaves are sessile, more lance-elliptic or oblong, numerous, and gradually reduced. The involucre is $\frac{1}{4}$ in. (7 to 8 mm) long, inversely conical, and wider than that of *A. curtus*. The bracts of the involucre have portions of structures overlapping, with a strong midrib or slight crease or ridge, and are white and papery, opaque, and thin below. There are 4 to 7 ray flowers (typically 5) that are white and $\frac{1}{8}$ to $\frac{1}{4}$ in. (4 to 7 mm) long. There are generally 13 to 21 pale yellowish disk flowers with purple anthers.

Identification Tips: *Aster oregonensis* closely resembles *A. curtus*; however, it differs in height, branching, length and number of rays, size and nervation of the leaves, nature of the crown, habitat, and geographic distribution. The rays of *A. oregonensis* are $\frac{1}{4}$ in. (4 to 7 mm) long, longer than the pappus, and there are mostly 4 to 7 per head. The plants are larger and more branched, 16 to 48 in. (40 to 120 cm) tall, and usually with several to many clusters of heads. In *A. curtus* there are few rays, they are shorter than the pappus, and 1 to 3 per head. The plants are relatively small and simple, 4 to 12 in. (10 to 30 cm) tall, and usually with a single compact cluster of heads. Where these species' habitats overlap in southwestern Washington and western Oregon they can generally be distinguished by their habitat and phenology. *A. oregonensis* flowers from August to September and is usually found in open woodlands and forests whereas *A. curtus* flowers between July and August and is found in remnant prairies. Use of a technical key is necessary for correct identification.

Phenology: Flowers from late August to early September.

Range: This species has been found in southwestern Washington, western Oregon, and northern California. In Washington *A. oregonensis* has only been seen in a few sites in Skamania County.

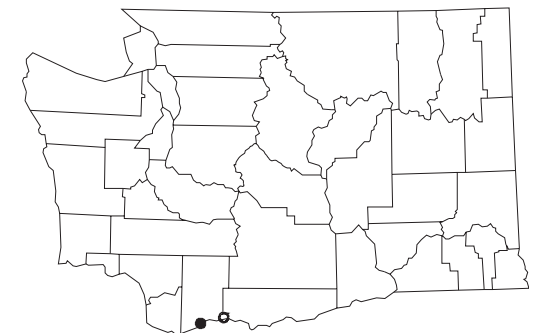
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Known distribution
of *Aster oregonensis*
in Washington



● Current (1980+)
○ Historic (older than 1980)

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Photo by Julie Nelson



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Habitat: Oregon white-topped aster is commonly found in open woodlands and dry, open, often rocky coniferous forest. Found from an elevation of 320 to 1150 ft (97 to 350 m) in Washington.

Ecology: This species prefers dry, open, well draining environments dominated by trees.

State Status Comments: Oregon white-topped aster is known in Washington from a few sites in the western Columbia River Gorge. There is one recent and one historical occurrence. Additional inventory is needed to assess the status of the species in the state.

Inventory Needs: Suitable habitats throughout the Columbia Gorge should be systematically surveyed. The recent and historic occurrences should also be revisited and more complete habitat information recorded.

Threats and Management Concerns: Definite threats have not been identified for this species. However, the small range of this taxon in Washington and the small number of known occurrences are major concerns. Any disturbance to the immediate habitat, such as grazing, timber harvest, agricultural or residential development, and recreational activities, constitutes a threat.

Comments: *Aster oregonensis* is a synonym for the accepted name: *Sericocarpus oregonensis* Nutt. var. *oregonensis* (USDA 2002).

References:

Hitchcock, C.L., A. Cronquist, M. Ownbey, J.W. Thompson. 1955. *Vascular Plants of the Pacific Northwest Part 5: Compositae*. University of Washington Press, Seattle, WA. 343 pp.

Jolley, R. 1988. *Wildflowers of the Columbia Gorge*. Oregon Historical Society Press, Portland, OR.

USDA, NRCS. 2002. The PLANTS Database, Version 3.5 (<http://plants.usda.gov>). National Plant Data Center, Baton Rouge, LA 70874-4490 USA.